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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the nature of morality and professional judgment from the perspective of executive and administrative decision making. The central focus includes matters on moral development as related to the professional training of administrators. A conceptual framework of moral development in making moral decisions begins with an examination of Piaget's work in cognitive development, and then discusses Kohlberg's theory of the development of moral judgment. The essay discusses Blatt's conditions for moral growth, and other work by Mosher and Newmann. In the author's view, the notion that educational leaders function as persons of integrity has generated complacency about the ethical dimension of leadership. An assumption was that school officials naturally possessed the necessary qualities to conduct themselves personally and professionally in accordance with generally accepted moral standards. Recently, that assumption was found to be seriously flawed. Administrative training programs have traditionally not addressed moral leadership as a primary component in their preparatory programs. The current reform effort is "to make visible that leadership involves moral choices, not simply adherence to technicism." Unless leaders develop a moral system of ethics based on conscious morality and good values, they will find it difficult to make ethical decisions and behave with a sense of integrity. (DFR)

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Educational Leaders as Moral Leaders: The Value of Virtue

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"Leadership is essentially a moral act."

Bart Giomatti.

Dominating today's headlines are revelations of improper conduct by elected leaders. Our nation is experiencing a moral crisis in the leadership ranks. However, issues of morality in leadership are not new. Going back to the first recorded discussion of moral education, Plato's Meno asks, "Can you tell me, Socrates, is virtue something that can be taught? Or does it come by practice? Or is it neither teaching or practice but natural aptitude or instinct?" Socrates replied by saying, You must think I am singularly fortunate to know whether virtue can be taught or how it is acquired. The fact is that far from knowing whether it can be taught, I have no idea what virtue itself is.'

The insight into human nature which declares that virtuous conduct helps to create the virtuous person goes back to the Greeks and possibly beyond. Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* addressed the problem of rationally configuring the organization of public life to sound moral principles.[2] These works are critical analyses of Athenian social life as well as critical examinations of what is the best way to live. Aristotle notes that a virtuous person does not possess only one virtue but rather is an individual whose behavior is moral in the various circumstances of life. Such a person possesses a series of appropriate habits constantly present and yet developing in the course of life. A virtue may be perfected through appropriate moral actions, but it also may happen that moral habits are weakened through the lack of exercise or by unethical conduct.[3]

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'Richard H. Hersh, Diana P. Palitto, and Joseph Reimer, Promoting Moral Growth: *From Piaget to Kohlberg* (New York, 1979), p. xii.

[2]"But whether it is also true that the just have a better life than the unjust and are also happier, which is the question we afterward proposed for examination, is what we now have to consider. It appears even now that they are I think, from what has already been said. But all thesame we must examine it more carefuly. For it is no ordinary matter that we are discussing, but the right conduct of life." Plato, *Republic*, 1: 352d.

[3]Nicomachean Ethics, 11, 4, 1105b 11- 18: Aristotle always insists on the necessity of practice: mere speculation on virtue is not helpful for acquiring moral habits.

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A Historical Perspective

David Zyack and Elizabeth Hansot describe educational leaders as managers of virtue. They point out that throughout most of the 20th century, the virtues of educational leaders were uncontested since they were expected to adopt and advance the cultural, social, and political value of mainstream America. The prevailing assumption was that they were virtuous beings who possessed and exhibited characteristics of exemplary moral conduct.[4]

For many years, the Department of Superintendency of the National Education Association printed brief biographies of its deceased leaders. During the nineteenth century, inscriptions depicted school leaders as earnest, pure, just, honest, true scholars and having a Christian character. The character of the individual was certified by church membership and social service.Leadership in public education was seen as a commitment to a high calling which one took reverently.[5] Educational leaders were expected to exemplify moral character more so than pedagogical expertise or specialized training. They were portrayed as experts in the formation of character. Leadership was legitimized by the continuance of selective traditional qualities. These individuals viewed themselves as scholars of the most rigid moral standards. The expectation was that these were noble men and women who behaved consistently with dignity at all times in all situations.

As a prologue to this discourse, I undertake this journey into the soul of morality from the viewpoint of educational leadership. My main concern is that of practical morality which involves determining and doing what is right and what is best. This essay will examine the nature of morality and professional judgement from the perspective of executive and administrative decision-making. The central focus will include matters on moral development as related to the professional educational training of administrators.

A Conceptual Framework of Moral Development

To critically analyze human behavior in making moral decisions, an examination of Piaget's work in cognitive development is in order. Piaget argues that human interaction with the environment is essential. He stresses that "moral judgement explicitly is a relationship between cognition and affect. For what is moral judgement if not a cognitive structuring of how we feel we ought to treat others and others to treat us?"[6] Piaget's work was not designed to delineate stages of moral judgement; yet, deeply rooted in his work is Kohlberg's theory of the development of moral judgement. In this theory, the overall intent is to assist a person in thinking through moral controversy in clear and comprehensive ways. For Kohlberg, "morality is most powerfully explained in terms of the logical processes through which one conceives and resolves moral

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[4]David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, Managers of Virtue (New York, 1962), p3-13.

[5]Ibid, p. 16.

[6]Hersh, Palitto, and Reimer, *Promoting*, p.39

conflicts. Morality hinges on the form in which choices are justified."[7] Moral dilemmas help to promote moral development because they arouse not only cognitive conflict in people but also their affective disequilibrium. When a person is faced with a moral conflict that cannot be easily resolved, in all likelihood there is the motivation to think through new possible solutions to the crisis which may prove growth producing when there is the construction of new modes of moral judgement.[8] KoWberg viewed morality as emerging as one confronts situations simple or complex. Perhaps moral/ethical development is achieved in the course of human development of conscious morals, values and a system of ethics.[9]

Blatt delineates conditions for moral growth that closely aligns with Kohlberg's theory of moral development. He argues that the development of moral judgement is amenable to educational intervention with movement from one stage to the next over a period of time. And educational intervention provides opportunities for cognitive conflict, moral awareness, and exposure to moral reasoning above one's own stage of reasoning.[10]Blatt's findings created a great deal of enthusiasm in educational circles because they indicate moral education programs as a means of effecting significant change in moral behavior.

An issue raised by Mosher relates to how we are to understand the relationship of moral development to other domains and to the whole of the personality." Moral development should have a priority over other developmental domains and should regulate them. activities. Self-confidence is hardly a virtue in a "hit man" nor is critical thinking in an extortionist."[12]

Fred Newmann devised a social action model on moral reasoning which places substantial attention on environmental competencies that sustain moral action. He contends that moral ideals should be put into practice. Newmann firmly believes that a relationship exists between the ability to exert influence on the environment and the degree to which persons can consider themselves moral agents.[13]

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[7]Richard H. Hersh, John P. Miller, and Glen D. Fielding, *Models of moral Education* (NewYork, 1980), p. 12.

[8]Robert Selman and Regina Yando, *Clinical Developmental Psychology* (San Francisco,1980).

[9]Floyd L. Ruch and Philip G. Zimbardo, *Psychology and Life* (Illinois, 197 1), p. 133.

[10]Ann Colby and Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Measurement of Moral Judgement, Vol 1: Theoretical Foundations and Research Validation* (New York, 1987).

"Ralph L. Mosher, Adolescents' Development and Education (Berkeley, 1979).

[12]F. Clark Power, Ann Higgins, and Lawrence Kohlberg, *Lawrence Kohlberg's approach to Moral Education* (New York, 1989).

[13]Hersh, Miller and Fielding, *Models of Moral Education*, pp. I I - 12.

In my view, moral development must be nurtured and developed from infancy. Moral judgement is reflected in the overall pattern of how one responds to moral situations. Moral development in individuals of all cultures progresses from an egocentric to a societal and, finally, a universal perspective. Proponents of theories of moral judgement concur that an individual's moral judgement grows less and less dependent on immediate personal and interpersonal reference points and, becomes anchored in universal principles of fairness in the highest stages of moral development.

Administrator Training in Moral Leadership

The notion that educational leaders function as persons of integrity has caused us to become complacent about the ethical dimension of leadership. An assumption was that school officials possessed the necessary qualities to conduct themselves personally and professionally in accordance with generally accepted moral standards. Recently, that "assumption has been seriously flawed."[14] Administrative training programs have traditionally not addressed moral leadership as a primary component in their preparatory programs. As educational leaders were considered for administrative positions, technical and political attributes became the impetus for employments.[15] As a result, preparation programs for school administrators have been criticized for emphasizing organizational, behavioral, and managerial theories while neglecting, contextual considerations of culture, politics, morals and ethics.[16] Foster posits the notion of administration as a moral science. "The moral side of administration has to do with the larger context of what it means to be human. The context of administration requires that an administrative science be reconstructed as a moral science. As a moral science, the science of administration is concerned with the resolution of moral dilemmas. Each decision carries moral, rather than technical implications. This realization distinguishes the administrator from the technocrat. Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of a human life. This is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas."[17] Cameron-McCabe also saw in the current debate a challenge to the technocratic perspective that has traditionally characterized administrative preparation programs. She points out that traditional programs taught administrators that organizations are rational, mechanistic structures that operate in a bureaucratic manner. The programs focused on operational tasks, training administrators as management functionaries;consideration of moral, ethical, and values dimensions of leadership were not present. A current reform effort is "to make visible that leadership involves moral choices, not simply adherence to technicism."[18]

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[14]Lynn G Beck, "Why Ethics? Why Now?," *The School Administrator* (October 1996),p. 8.

[15]Ibid.

[16]William P. Foster, *Paradigms and Promises: New Approaches to Educational Administration* (Buffalo, 1986).

[17]Ibid, pp.24-33.

[18]Nelda Cameron-McCabe, "Leadership for Democratic Authority", J. Murphy (ed.), *Preparing Tomorrow's School Leaders: Alternative Designs* (University Park, 1993), p. 157.

Sergiovanni holds a similar position. In his view, the dominating emphases in contemporary programs are on rationality, logic, objectivity, the importance of self-interest, explicitness, individuality and detachment, which causes one to neglect the importance of group relations, morality, self-sacrifice, duty and obligation as additional values. "We have come to view leadership as behavior rather than action, as something psychological rather than spiritual, as having to do with persons rather than ideas." [19]

To address this bias, attention must be directed to preparatory curriculums that specifically lend credence to matters of professional and moral authority. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration has recommended that the curriculum preparing school administrators be designed to provide tools and framework to assist in assessing the moral and ethical implications of the decisions they make. Scholars of school administration must come to understand the concept of public trust and to realize how values affect behavior and outcomes.[20]

As trends in the reform of school administration preparation programs are studied, Murphy recognizes that there is a new and general concern for including ethics in the curriculum. He says that underlying this concern is an understanding that sound professional judgement and conduct are contingent on sound ethical judgement and conduct. Unless leaders develop a moral system of ethics based on conscious morality and good values, they will find it difficult to make ethical decisions and behave with a sense of integrity.[21]

Paula M. Short emphasizes that the preparation of school administrators requires strategies that develop the capacity of school leaders to make sense of unclear and unique situations and problems and to understand the complexities of the job.[22] Given the intricacies involved in administrative decision-making, frequent ethical dilemmas are inevitable. "An ethical dilemma occurs when, in a given situation, a decision must abrogate one moral conviction in order to uphold another."[23]

Conclusion

James M. Gustafson sums up well my feelings concerning moral leadership. He stated that "human beings are moral actors; we have experiences which can loosely be called moral before we are ever formally taught anything about ethics. We respond to one another, to rules and patterns in ways which enhance or detract from human well-beings. We are initiators, whose purposive words and whose use of energy, money, and other forms of power have some beneficial

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[19]Thomas Sergiovanni, *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement*,(San Francisco, 1992)p.3.

[20]National Policy Board for Educational Administration, *Improvising The Preparation of School Administrators: The Reform Agenda*, (Charlottesville, 1989).

[21]Joseph Murphy (ed.), *Preparing Tomorrow's School Leaders: Alternative Designs* (University Park, 1993).

[22]Paula Short, "Reflection in Administrator Preparation," *Peabody Journal of Education*, 72, 1997, p. 86.

[23]David Price, "Ethical Dilemmas in Administrative Practice," *Adult Learning*, at Fall 1997, p. 10.

or harmful effects on other persons and on the course of events. We are from our earliest years deciding, commending, evaluating, and exerting influence and power about matters which involve moral values."[24]

So, what's the "right" or "moral" course of action for an educational administrator to follow? Perhaps Isherwood put it best when he said, "a right course of action available to an administrator is the course of action that an administrator can stand behind, believe in."[25] Thus, if such actions, coupled with such convictions, sustain the test of time, we can then assume that they will have value in the future as well. To look ahead, administrators and educators must also look behind.

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[24]James M Gustafson, "Education for Moral Responsibility," *Five Lectures on Moral Education*, (Cambridge, MA, 1970), p. 13.

[25] Geoffrey B. Isherwood, "Moral Choices in Administration," *Education Canada*, Summer 1995,